

Contract paves way for big energy savings

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Consulting agency helps school district officials realize big savings on utility bills.

Dee Miles doesn't come across too many surefire, guaranteed-money-making business proposals in his position as the Duchesne County School District business administrator.

So when school board members and district administrators discovered an opportunity to get involved with a company called Energy Education Inc., the offer was too good to pass up.

The Dallas-based company has a team of energy-saving experts who consult with clients all over the country on how to make changes to save big on their utility bills.

According to the company's Web site, www.energyped.com, signing on with the company comes with a guarantee: If they don't save you more money than you spend for their services, they'll refund you a check for the difference.

"It looked like a good program we couldn't lose on," Miles said. "Now that we're into it, it's been far better than we ever anticipated."

Under advice from officials at Energy Education Inc., local administrators hired Ed Attryde last spring to fill the position of district energy manager.

Attryde, a long-time local educator, still teaches full-time. Part-time, he works closely with Energy Education Inc. consultants and district employees to help implement suggested changes.

"We're taking a comprehensive look at how we can save district-wide," Attryde said. "Nothing is too big or too small. We're proud of the savings we've made so far, and we'll continue to redirect those savings and spend them in other areas that will benefit the students."

School district officials hired the energy education consultants just six months ago. From May to August, tips from experts there saved the district \$52,900 on their utility bills. Attryde said the exact amount of just how much money has been saved was confirmed through the use of a complicated, third-party software database that took into account factors like rising utility costs and daily weather data to calculate the final figure.

"This type of savings really authenticates what we're doing," Attryde said.

Attryde said the district's greatest potential to save money will come during the summer, as well as on nights, weekends, and holidays when the buildings are shut down.

In the past, many district buildings have been designed with the school day in mind as far as utilities go, with large zones of the building having the same heating and air conditioning controls.

As a result, when one teacher came in during the summer to work on a lesson plan and flipped on the air conditioning, or when one single gym was being used at night

for a community volleyball game, lights and air-conditioning or heating would also run in much of the school – in rooms that weren't even being used.

“Setting up the system with large zones is fine as far as the school day goes,” Attryde said. “But what happens when people go home? We redid our systems and divided many of the schools into smaller zones. This has allowed us to be much more intelligent with how we use our utilities.”

In addition to re-zoning some of the district’s buildings, officials also plan to lower the temperature of hot water heaters in the warmer spring, summer and fall months and expect to see additional savings as a result of that change.

The savings district officials saw over the summer are the result of collaboration from dozens of different people and several organizations. In particular, Attryde said representatives from local utility companies, particularly Moon Lake Electric Association and Questar, have been an irreplaceable source of support for district officials’ goals to use energy more efficiently.

Attryde said company representatives were quick to provide him with any past utility bills he needed to see and also volunteered to bring in free equipment for district officials to use in creating a profile of their history of use and demand pattern.

Additional credit for the \$52,900 the district saved over the summer lies with employees who were responsible for helping implement changes, particularly members of the custodial and maintenance staff.

“The school district employees really deserve the lion’s share of the credit,” Attryde said. “This is the first time we’ve tried to do what we’re doing in this way and it’s required all of us to change some of our habits. Everyone has been supportive.”

According to Miles, Duchesne County School District officials have signed a four-year contract with Energy Education Inc. and will pay \$6,800 per month for those consulting services. After the four-year period ends, local officials will still reap – free-of-charge – a lifetime of savings from implemented changes and consultants from the corporation will still be available if the district requests them.

Despite the success so far, Attryde said he can imagine people questioning whether the school district should be paying \$6,800 out of pocket monthly for the consulting fee instead of simply making the necessary changes on their own.

“The answer to that question is that no one on the district level has the national vantage point and a comprehensive picture of how schools can be run more efficiently like the team of experts at Energy Education, Inc.,” he said. “They have visited thousands of schools and can provide us with the background and encouragement we need to actually follow through and change our habits. We wouldn’t have saved as much as we did without their help.”

Attryde said the consulting firm is continually sending experts to Duchesne County to help evaluate potential areas for savings. Technical support for encountered problems is just a phone call away. In his position as district energy manager, Attryde also has the opportunity to attend seminars sponsored by the company three times a year to network with and learn from other energy managers from across the nation.

“Our contract with this company is revenue-neutral, so we can never lose money on it,” he said. “That means there’s no downside, and the long-term upside is huge.”